

HOUSE BILL 161

By Johnson

AN ACT to name the dining area of the Brig. Gen. Wendell H. Gilbert Tennessee State Veterans Home in Clarksville in honor of Command Sergeant Major (Retired) Sidney Brown, United States Army.

WHEREAS, many fine and honorable traditions have arisen from the deep wellspring of honor and bravery possessed by Tennesseans, but there is no finer tradition than that which gave Tennessee its nickname; and

WHEREAS, the citizens of the Volunteer State have, throughout the years, willingly forsaken the comforts and securities of inaction by taking up arms against the enemies of this great Nation, risking their lives and leaving their loved ones behind in order to honorably safeguard the freedoms and liberties guaranteed to all citizens of these United States and vanquishing those who threaten our way of life; and

WHEREAS, one such courageous Volunteer is Command Sergeant Major (Retired) Sidney Brown, United States Army, who was one of the first African-American Army paratroopers after World War II and who distinguished himself in combat in Vietnam; and

WHEREAS, Command Sergeant Major Sidney Brown grew up in Birmingham, Alabama, during the 1940s and experienced firsthand the all-encompassing racism of the Jim Crow era; instead of capitulating to the societal ill of segregation, he drew inspiration from the black paratroopers who visited from Fort Benning, Georgia, wearing their silver wings, and the exploits of the legendary Buffalo Nickles, the first African-American paratrooper company, the 555th Parachute Infantry Company, which was formed from volunteers from the all-black 92nd "Buffalo" Infantry Division; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Brown wanted nothing more than to earn his own jump wings, and he began to realize that dream when he reported to Fort Campbell in September 1950, just as the 11th Airborne was being transformed from an infantry to an airborne division; and

WHEREAS, with the arrival of the 11th Airborne at Fort Campbell, a second all-black parachute battalion was formed as the 3rd Battalion, 188th Parachute Infantry Regiment, and Sidney Brown was accepted to airborne school; and

WHEREAS, he once again overcame the repressive forces of racism to complete airborne school, and by 1951, he had earned the rank of Sergeant; and

WHEREAS, in 1952, the Airborne became the last faction of the U.S. Army to integrate, and Sergeant Brown received his orders to serve as a tank commander in Germany; and

WHEREAS, in 1956, Sergeant Brown returned to Fort Campbell just as the newly reborn 101st Airborne Division was also making Fort Campbell its home; and

WHEREAS, at the halfway point of his outstanding thirty-year career in the Army and having attained the rank of Staff Sergeant, Sidney Brown served his first tour of combat duty with the 1st Brigade of the 101st Airborne as part of Charlie Company, 2nd Battalion, 502nd Infantry Regiment; and

WHEREAS, historically referred to as the "Nomads of Vietnam," the 502nd was the Army's "fire brigade" in Vietnam, being constantly on the move from one trouble spot to the next; and

WHEREAS, in this stressful and dangerous environment, Staff Sergeant Brown grasped the opportunity to display his skills and excelled as a leader of men in combat; and

WHEREAS, in December 1967, he returned for a second tour of duty in Vietnam as a platoon sergeant and "Currahee" soldier with the 506th Infantry; and

WHEREAS, no stranger to honors and accolades, Command Sergeant Major Brown has received the Legion of Merit, Bronze Star with "V" (Valor) Device, Meritorious Service Medal with three Oak Leaf Clusters, ten awards of the Good Conduct Medal, Vietnam Palm Cross with

Gallantry, Vietnam Service Medal, Korean Occupational Medal, European Occupational Medals, Master Parachutist Badge, and Combat Infantryman's Badge; and

WHEREAS, as a resident of Clarksville, Mr. Brown was instrumental in bringing the Montgomery County state veterans home to fruition; and

WHEREAS, he is active in the 555th Parachute Infantry Association that honors the sacrifices and struggles of the black paratroopers who not only fought the enemy, but also fought for equality in the U.S. Army; and

WHEREAS, he is also working toward the erection of a monument to honor the 3rd Battalion, 188th Parachute Infantry Regiment, the second all-black paratrooper battalion formed by the Army; and

WHEREAS, Montgomery County acquired real estate for the development of a Tennessee State Veterans Home in Montgomery County, and on May 17, 2013, a groundbreaking was held for such Tennessee State Veterans Home; and

WHEREAS, officially unveiled to the public on January 11, 2016, the Brig. Gen. Wendell H. Gilbert Tennessee State Veterans Home in Clarksville provides an invaluable resource for the citizens of Montgomery County; and

WHEREAS, Command Sergeant Major (Retired) Sidney Brown served with great courage and gallantry throughout his career, ever willing to sacrifice personal safety and concerns for the enduring freedom of his country and the preservation of the ideals that forged this great Nation, and he deserves proper recognition from the State of Tennessee and Montgomery County; now, therefore,

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE:

SECTION 1. Notwithstanding any provision of law to the contrary, the dining area of the Brig. Gen. Wendell H. Gilbert Tennessee State Veterans Home in Montgomery County is

hereby named in honor of Command Sergeant Major (Retired) Sidney Brown, United States Army, in recognition of his life of honor, valor, commitment, and purpose.

SECTION 2. The Tennessee state veterans home board shall cause to be erected suitable signs or affixed suitable markers designating the dining area as provided in Section 1.

SECTION 3. This act shall take effect upon becoming a law, the public welfare requiring it.